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City of Rome
Revolution. It's in their Nature

City of Rome
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CITY OF ROME, NY:
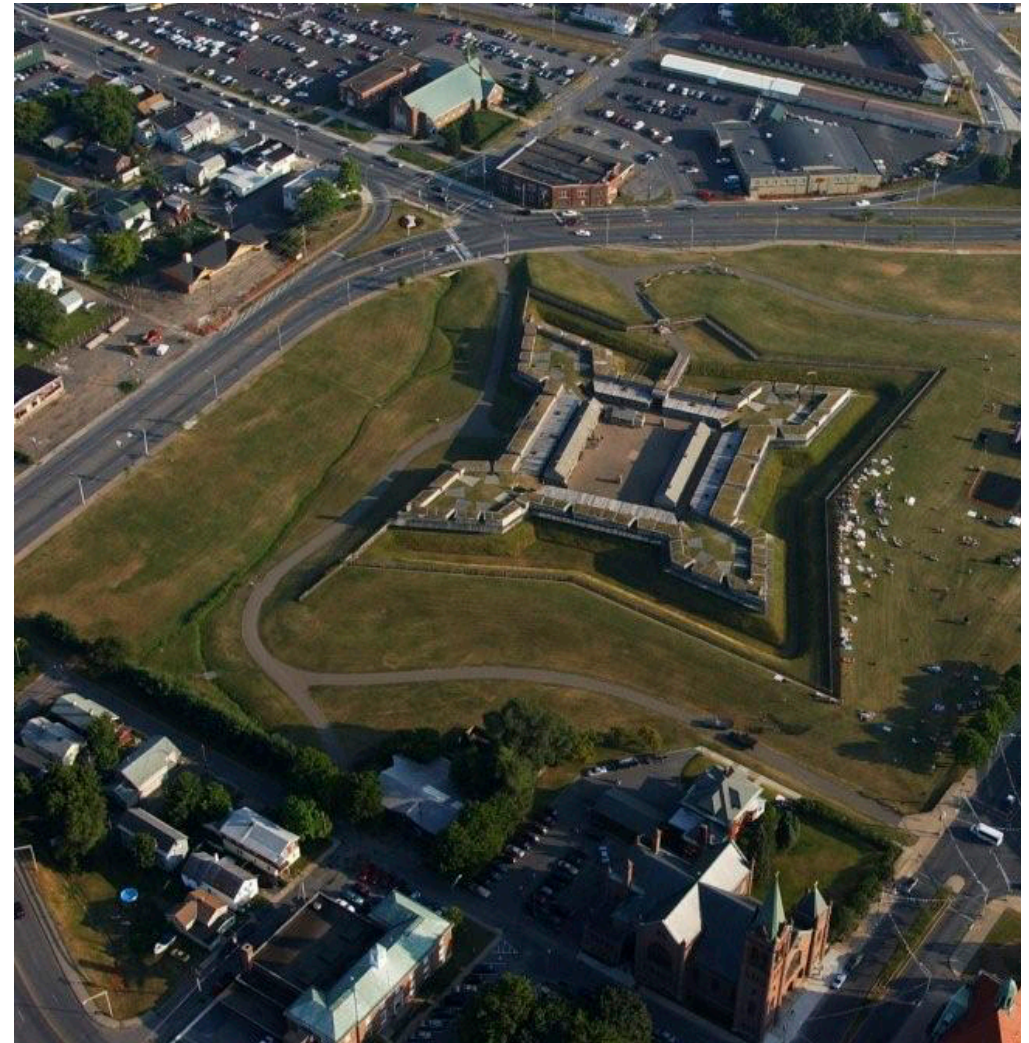## REVOLUTION.
IT'S IN THEIR NATURE

DRIVEN BY A COMMITMENT TO 'RE-THINK' THEIR CITY, ROME IS TRANSFORMING THEIR HISTORIC COMMUNITY INTO A SUSTAINABLE EMPIRE

WRITTEN BY HEATHER RUSHWORTH
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SITUATED ON THE WESTERN FLANK of New York's Mohawk Valley, the City of Rome is a historic manufacturing town, nestled along sixteen miles of canal waterfront. The natural scenic potential of Rome is undeniable, and over the last ten years the City has made every effort to unleash this potential, transforming it through strategic initiatives into a vivid reality. Through green infrastructure, alternative energy, brownfield planning, and powerful partnerships, Rome has successfully revitalized their small community into a thriving, green, high-tech, eco example of sustainability.

Chris Mercurio, the City's Economic Development Coordinator, sums up Rome's sense of environmental responsibility. "We believe we rise and fall by the vitality of our downtown, and that the City won't survive unless we tackle the blight threatening our urban core," he says. "We are a small community that thinks big - and that is really where our strength is.

There are so few small communities who are able to coalesce and put together smart growth strategies. We have been able to leverage resources, and partner with the private sector to showcase some progressive initiatives."

THE POWER OF A LUSH CANOPY

Ten years ago, Rome committed to become one of the greenest cities in the nation through the concentrated effort of their own people. Citizens were frustrated with their city's lack of street trees and urban plantings, so then-Mayor Griffo appointed a committee to concentrate on implementing initiatives to start 'greening' their beloved city.

Through very simple, targeted, inexpensive urban horticulture tactics they were able to greatly improve their city's overall aesthetic value and quality of life.

One of the first steps taken by the Common Council was to hire an arborist, who worked with Public Works and Economic Development officials to implement purely scientific municipal inventory of the City's trees. Mercurio explains the inventory process. "We sought to measure the effect our canopy has on our city. We discovered the effects go far beyond the aesthetic. The canopy actually cleans our air through reducing particulate pollution, enhances

property values, mitigates blight, and functions as a biogenic stormwater management system," he says.

In order to take effective inventory, the City utilized an iTree to quantify the value of these 'ecosystem services,' which is a Nobel Award-winning program developed by the US Forest Service. What the City of Rome found out in particular is, "For every dollar we invest in green infrastructure, we gain two to three dollars in real ecosystem services," says Mercurio. As a result, the City's Forestry Division maintains over

6,000 trees and a comprehensive network of urban plantings and green infrastructure.

REVOLUTIONARY RETROFITS

However, making Rome lusher was not where their endeavors stopped. The City underwent a massive renovation of their overall energy usage, becoming more energy efficient through lighting, appliances, fixtures, cooling and envelope improvements to their buildings, processes, and wastewater treatment plant – which eventually went on to earn a series of awards for engineering and efficiency.

In fact, City Hall reduced their annual energy consumption by over half million dollars per year. Mercurio remembers how their energy shifts, spearheaded by Public Works Commissioner Frank Tallarino, inspired more changes. "We thought, now that we are the most efficient that we can be with respect to consumption, how can we start producing our own energy?"

So the City took advantage of some really progressive policies through the 'Recovery Act,' and the NYS Energy Research & Development Authority and installed a 129,000 kWh per year of photovoltaic electrical generation. Situated on three municipal buildings, the solar arrays consistently offset the City's energy consumption by another 10 percent.

Rome also put together a clearing-house website for homeowners (www.rome13440zone.org), businesses and those who want to take advantage of federal and state initiatives such as energy audits or to install photovoltaic or geothermic systems. The website conveys the information in real-time, making the transition to efficiency, conservation, and alternative energy more natural for homeowners and small business.

PAVING A NEW ROAD FOR TRANSPORTATION

Rome has also recently completed a 'Municipal Energy Efficiency Plan' to restructure the City's conservation and transportation systems, by looking

for opportunities in compressed natural gas, net metering, and alternative transportation. Through a program started by the Synapse Sustainability Trust, the City of Rome became part of an Upstate network of over one hundred public electronic vehicle (EV) charging stations.

The Director of Synapse, Vita DeMarchi, describes the leadership of Rome in this endeavor. "Rome has taken a leadership role in the Mohawk Valley to create a lower carbon emission region through an alternative transportation model, promoting green economic development and contributing to a more sustainable community," DeMarchi says.

While these charging stations will have a great impact on the planet, they also impact the lives of the eco-friendly traveler. As Chris Mercurio put it, "This promotes tourism while supporting the EV industry by eliminating range-anxiety. People who own an electric vehicle or a plug-in hybrid will discover that Rome is part of an international EV charging network. They can charge-up, hang out, visit Fort Stanwix, have lunch in Rome and move on to where they are going," says Mercurio.

FROM BROWN TO GREEN

For "rust-belt" communities, perhaps the most fundamental smart growth strategy is the cleanup and reuse of brownfield properties. Rome has embraced New York's visionary Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) Program as the choice weapon to combat urban blight. The City is aggressively eliminating vacant, abandoned, and contaminated structures to pave

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Synapse Sustainability Trust

the way for waterfront development, advanced manufacturing and innovative public-private partnerships. Community-driven redevelopment plans represent the intersection of vision and reality.

Mayor Joseph Fusco explains that "The abundance of infrastructure downtown provides a host of redevelopment scenarios." Rome's goal is to be the most business-friendly community in Upstate New York; and if the past few years are any indicator, the City is well on its way to achieving that goal. A strong global metal and wire industry coupled with advanced engineering technology positions Rome squarely in the supply chain of the twenty-first century economy.

THE FUTURE IS IN FULL BLOOM

While the City of Rome has changed the sustainable realities of its immediate citizens, it has greater aims for its green endeavors. Ultimately, the City wants to share the initiatives they have attempted so hard to achieve with their surrounding communities. The City recently assembled a consortium for a six-county regional sustainability grant application for a million dollars - which will cover everything from brownfield redevelopment strategies, beautification, job

Rome in Bloom

MV map

creation, conservation, identifying market sectors for growth, alternative transportation opportunities and alternative fuel opportunities for biomass production and solar generation.

In regards to their future, Mercurio says, "We have to be the leaders. The future demands it. We want our success to become a success for not just Rome, for the entire Mohawk River Valley Region."

If the City of Rome's tireless commitment to smart partnerships, sustainable development, and deployment of alternative energy is any testament -- then like a contagion – the City's example is bound to awaken the rest of New York's natural potential in the near future.

STATISTICS

Name:
City of Rome NY

Country:
USA

Employees: **100+**

Est: **1796**

Revenue: **58 Million**

Industry:
Green Community

Premiere service:
City Services

Mayor: **Joseph Fusco**

Website:
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